

# Experienced Workplace Incivility and Instigated Workplace Incivility

Subjects: Management

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Multiple forms of workplace incivility exist in organizations, including experienced workplace incivility and instigated workplace incivility. Workplace uncivil behaviors can have financial repercussions for the organization due to customer loss, bad reputation, low levels of creativity from employees, and high employee turnover intention. Employees being victims of experienced workplace incivility (EWI) may feel stress due to an unhealthy work environment and may ultimately respond with instigated workplace incivility (IWI).

Keywords: experienced workplace incivility ; incivility ; instigated workplace incivility ; Islamic work ethics ; workplace incivility

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## 1. Introduction

Ninety-five percent of the total workforce faces some form of workplace bullying or uncivil acts <sup>[1][2]</sup>. Workplace uncivil behaviors can have financial repercussions for the organization due to customer loss, bad reputation, low levels of creativity from employees, and high employee turnover intention <sup>[3]</sup>. Multiple forms of workplace incivility exist in organizations, including experienced workplace incivility and instigated workplace incivility <sup>[4]</sup>. Aggressive behaviors depicted in organizations often stem from generational issues, ranging from physical violence and harassment to comparatively milder behaviors such as psychological aggression, and adversely affect not only the organization's reputation but also employee performance <sup>[5][6][7]</sup>.

In today's competency-driven era, organizations strive for the retention of a competent workforce. Employees' behavior depends upon the treatment they receive from their colleagues which acts as an antecedent for their outcome behaviors. Respectful and dignified treatment motivates employees to reciprocate with positive behavior, which consequently triggers a positive spiral in the organization <sup>[8]</sup>. On the contrary, negative behaviors shown to employees induce negative behavior, a term known as the incivility spiral <sup>[9]</sup>. Employees facing incivility from their colleagues build a tendency to respond with incivility, resulting in interpersonal conflict in the organization <sup>[9]</sup>.

Employees being victims of experienced workplace incivility (EWI) may feel stress due to an unhealthy work environment and may ultimately respond with instigated workplace incivility (IWI) <sup>[10]</sup>. Consequently, exposure to incivility can negatively impact employee performance <sup>[11][12]</sup>. That is, the culmination of experienced incivility and stress can induce employees to respond with their own uncivil acts <sup>[13]</sup>. However, there is a paucity of empirical evidence in this regard in the literature. Therefore, the aim of this entry is to explore the impact of EWI on IWI and examine the role of stress as a mediator between them.

Employees' behavior also depends on their religious ideology <sup>[14][15][16][17]</sup> as religion impacts both personal and professional lives <sup>[18]</sup>. Ethics and values based on religion assist employees to differentiate between desirable and undesirable behaviors and thereby impacting their performance <sup>[19]</sup>. Islamic work ethics stem from the teachings of the Quran and Sunnah (teachings and sayings of Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him (PBUH)), which categorize hard work as an absolution of sins and a means of best-achieved sustenance of life <sup>[20]</sup>. Unlike protestant work ethics, Islamic work ethics (IWE) primarily focus on employees' intent <sup>[16][21]</sup>.

The literature available on the EWI-IWI relationship is scant. Further investigation is required to understand this relationship. Only a few studies including <sup>[5][7]</sup> have explored the relationship between EWI and IWI. However, these studies have been conducted in the western context, and the impact of stress has not been addressed. Moreover, IWE is an important determinant in shaping behaviors in Islamically dominant societies. The extant literature provides little to no

direction with regard to IWE. This entry fills this void and posits that IWE acts as a shielding mechanism and diminishes the impact of EWI.

Incivility is a substantial problem in the contemporary work environment and results in the loss of resources and operational efficiency. Employees experiencing incivility respond by showing incivility, resulting in an incivility spiral at the workplace. Such a phenomenon once started is difficult to reverse and results in the wastage of resources, loss of talent, and lower operational efficiency. The purposes of this entry are to empirically investigate (1) the impact of experienced workplace incivility on instigated workplace incivility, (2) the role of stress as a mediator between EWI and IWI, and (3) the impact of IWE as a moderator on the EWI–IWI and Stress–IWI relationships.

## **2. Instigated Workplace Incivility**

Instigated workplace incivility can be explained as “unconscious or subconscious low intent behaviors with the ambiguous aim of harming the target in violation of mutual respect norms of workplace” [9]. It can also be said that instigated workplace incivility is “inconsequential words and deeds that violate the conventional norms of workplace conduct” [3]. Examples of uncivil behaviors include sarcasm, unwelcomed jokes, cold behavior, hostile stares, denigrating tones, and silent treatments [22].

One of the first studies on incivility was conducted by Blau and Andersson [9]. Blau and Andersson collected data from respondents with different occupations including security officers, waitresses, paralegals, data entry operators, and caretakers. They posited that distributive and procedural injustice, emotional burnout, and job dissatisfaction can act as an antecedent for instigated workplace incivility [9]. When employees feel that they are being abused or not being treated fairly in the workplace, it starts an incivility spiral between the individuals instigating incivility and targets. Consequently, target employees reciprocate by engaging in incivility including theft, rule-breaking, and cyber-loafing [23].

Raza et al. [24] conducted a study in which they collected data from employees working in hotels. They also established that the perception of injustice leads to incivility in the workplace. [4][7][25][26][27] established in their studies that employees experiencing incivility from others including supervisors, subordinates and colleagues are prone to show some sort of counterproductive behavior. Moreover, these studies have included samples from both manufacturing and service sectors and collected both cross-sectional and longitudinal data eliciting the importance and impact of workplace incivility.

## **3. Experienced Workplace Incivility**

Schilpzand et al. [28] conducted a meta-analysis of incivility, categorizing it into three sub-dimensions: experienced, witnessed, and instigated workplace incivilities. They found that majority of the studies have focused on experienced workplace incivility. Experienced incivility is becoming a towering issue at work. Employees experiencing incivility are more prone to depict rude behaviors as uncivil behaviors are in violation of fundamental norms including politeness and respect [5][29]. Social exchange and incivility [30], and incivility spiral [5] suggest that individuals' interactions are based on the philosophy of reciprocity and that employees behave in the context of their antecedent behaviors. Therefore, employees that experience uncivil behaviors reciprocate with uncivil behaviors towards the perpetrators since they view it as justified means of reciprocation [25].

Incivility can also lead to rude behaviors not only toward perpetrators but also towards other employees [31][32][33], and it does not need multiple occurrences. A single event of incivility can lead to a contagion incivility spiral [31]. Reaction to incivility can be immediately following the stimulus from perpetrators [31], or it can happen at some later time [34]. Employees experiencing incivility get caught in a spiral of incivility either to reciprocate with ambiguous intent or as a defense mechanism [28].

Employees facing incivility believe that the organization has built up a tolerance for rude behaviors; so, such actions are not checked thereby allowing employees to elicit such acts. Employees facing incivility tend to settle the score by reciprocating uncivil behaviors with similar reactions and these reactions can be more, less, or similar in intensity [5][7].

## **4. Stress**

Job stress can be defined as the discomfort that an individual faces due to his or her work situation, which is a result of an imbalance between job demands and resources [35][36]. The reasons why employees show stress include the lack of autonomy, overwhelming job demands, interpersonal conflicts, and an uncomfortable work environment [37]. Spector and Fox [37] devised a model in which they linked stress with negative and counterproductive behaviors in the workplace. They

postulated that employees evaluate and appraise events that occur in the organization and events that are perceived as threatening trigger emotional responses including workplace incivility [38].

Stress has been studied in the context of workplace incivility in a number of studies with numerous findings such as workplace incivility as a source of stress [39], family-to-work conflict due to stress [40][41], high stress level on uncivil treatment days [42], workaholics and higher level of stress [43], ostracism, incivility and stress [44], and witnessed incivility, stress, and job satisfaction [4][45]. The current accumulation of research provides strong support for the connection of incivility with stress both as an antecedent and consequence.

The literature proves that stress has a strong association with incivility and workers can feel stressed when they experience incivility which can become a cause of the incivility spiral. Employees going through stress because of experiencing incivility are more prone to depict incivility [10][37][46]. Anjum and Ming [44] proposed that a toxic work environment not only creates uncivil reactions such as knowledge hiding but also becomes a reason for stress at work. Employees facing EWI go through various emotions before responding and such emotions include stress [47]. Uncomfortable with the treatment being received, employees are perplexed and experience negative emotions that may have a toll on their performance.

## **5. Islamic Work Ethics**

The concept of contemporary work ethics as we know them was explored by Weber [48] who advocated the philosophy of protestant work ethics. Weber [48] emphasized that protestant work ethics promote the concepts of hard work, individualism, discipline, and frugality. The work was carried out predominantly based on Protestant work ethics (PWE) and was in the western world. As time went on, scholars have recognized that societies based on PWE are different from the societies that do not follow PWE. So, it is safe to say that PWE is not applicable to societies that are not based on protestant religious ideologies and values [17][49]. Consequently, scholars have started to examine work ethics in different societies based on different religions including Hinduism, Confucianism, Islam, Buddhism, and Judaism [14][16].

In addition to the work ethics identified, some scholars such as Ali and Yousef [20][50] have worked on the concept of Islamic Work Ethics (IWE). The baseline philosophy of PWE and IWE is similarly focusing on hard work, commitment, dedication to work, and avoidance of wealth accumulation through unnecessary means [16][24]. The main difference between PWE and IWE is that IWE focuses on intention rather than the outcome. The foundation of IWE is based on the teachings of the Quran and Sunnah as advocated by Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) who preached that the actions of individuals are recorded based on intentions and individuals will be rewarded or punished accordingly [21][50]. The importance of IWE is pivotal as Islam is the second largest religion in the world constituting 24.1% percent of the world population with 1.8 billion Muslims around the world [51].

IWE acts as a catalyst for steering behavioral patterns of individuals who follow Islam as their religious school of thought. Islam guides workers to exert optimum effort at their workplace [52]. Institutions that provide bread and butter hold a special sanctity as per Islamic teachings [53]. Islam propagates that employees should work for the benefit of their workplace and should refrain from any activities that might directly or indirectly become the cause of loss for the employer [54][55][56]. Islam also preaches that individuals should not only focus on the financial aspect and benefit but should also be on his or her best behavior at the workplace [57]. Employees should not be adversely affected by the negative behaviors of their colleagues, rather they should try to work towards making their workplace constructive and fruitful [52][58]. IWE is extracted from deep philosophical underpinnings, so they advocate similar notions.

Empirical investigations demonstrate that IWE stimulates positive work outcomes including job satisfaction, job involvement [16], knowledge-sharing behaviors [58], and helping behaviors [14] while having a diminishing effect on counterproductive behaviors [59] and turnover intention [16][60].

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